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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0956
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0117
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2145
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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SUBJECT: POLITICAL STALEMATE CONTINUES: ELECTION PREVIEW #8

REF: A. GEORGETOWN 371

[1B.](#) GEORGETOWN 344
[1C.](#) GEORGETOWN 308
[1D.](#) GEORGETOWN 181

[11.](#) (U) SUMMARY. Guyana's election impasse has moved into a new phase. The country currently has neither a legislature (dissolved May 2 by President Jagdeo) nor an election date (no new date has been set since the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) decided April 12 that it could not meet the August 4 constitutional due date for elections (ref A)). Over the past month GECOM has worked towards a revised timeline for an August 31 election day. The GoG has temporarily bought itself some breathing room by unilaterally amending the constitution to extend the election deadline by one month -- a move that has predictably brought threats of legal action from the opposition. Observers agree that meeting even this new September 2 constitutional deadline will be very difficult. While Parliament's dissolution passed without great incident, opposition leaders at a May 13 rally called on their supporters to take to the streets in protest. END SUMMARY.

Governance Status: No Legislature, No Election Date

[12.](#) (U) President Jagdeo dissolved Parliament on May 2 (the next to last possible day) without bipartisan consensus on election timing or how to deal with the country's governance until elections take place. Just prior, Parliament amended Article 61 of Guyana's constitution to require that elections be held within four months of Parliament's dissolution, instead of three months as originally written. The GoG was able to pass this amendment with a simple majority. Legislators left Article 69, the other pertinent section, unchanged -- the new Parliament "shall begin ... four months from the end" of the prior Parliament's dissolution. Unlike Article 61, Article 69 is one of the constitution's sections that requires a two-thirds majority (and thus opposition support) to amend. The parliamentary opposition parties were counting on this fact to extract political concessions for their support of an amendment. Circumvented by the GoG, the opposition predictably disagrees with the GoG's constitutional interpretation and has threatened legal

challenge.

13. (SBU) Where does this constitutional tinkering leave the elections process? On the one hand, the GoG has temporarily bought itself some breathing room by extending the constitutional due date for elections to September 2, in post's estimation. (Note: The parties and GECOM are still unclear as to whether the actual new due date is September 2nd or 3rd -- underscoring that this was a rush job constitutional amendment). On the other hand, the consensus view in Georgetown is that the chances of meeting the new deadline are slim. Under Article 69, the new Parliament is still constitutionally mandated to meet by September 2. GECOM is working on the basis of a timeline with an August 31 election day. This creates an untenable situation. In practical terms, this means that votes would have to be transported and counted, results announced, and new MPs named between August 31 and September 2 -- an almost inconceivable scenario even in the unlikely event that there are no more slippages in GECOM's work plan.

14. (U) The GoG's internal legal analysis supporting Article 61's amendment also set forth the opinion that President Jagdeo and his ministers could remain in their positions indefinitely until the next elections are held.

Opposition Election Commissioners Return: But For How Long?

15. (U) The three opposition-nominated election commissioners who "withdrew" from GECOM April 15 returned to the fold for GECOM's May 12 meeting. Nevertheless, the meeting was acrimonious and unproductive. The source of dispute remains

GEORGETOWN 00000462 002 OF 002

the opposition's demand for verification of the voters list (reftels). Having set a precedent of retreating when they fail to get their way, the opposition commissioners could withdraw again before the May 19 GECOM meeting.

Faltering Political Dialogue; Opposition Rally Call

16. (U) The ruling PPP/C and main opposition PNC/R parties continue to engage in a halting dialogue aimed at resolving the impasse over verification. If a solution is to be found, it will have to come from the politicians rather than GECOM. However, both sides have sent only lukewarm signals of willingness to compromise.

17. (U) The parliamentary opposition parties held a May 13 rally, urging their supporters to "enter the struggle" and go "into the streets". PNC/R leader Robert Corbin later invoked his stock phrase again: "There can be no peace without justice." As usual, the speakers did not explain what these statements/threats entail, nor what supporters should do once they are in the streets.

OAS Long-term Observers Arrive

18. (U) OAS' two-person electoral observation mission arrived in Guyana May 12-13. They are on contract to remain in country through the end of September and will focus on technical preparations for the elections.

Comment

19. (SBU) Most observers think that further slippages in election preparations are unavoidable, meaning that the additional month gained by the constitutional amendment is

merely a superficial fix. The root cause of the unresolved election delay is the ruling PPP/C and opposition PNC/R's unwillingness to find a political compromise that allows elections to proceed in a constructive fashion. Without such negotiation and compromise, the political temperature in Guyana will continue to rise as September and a fresh constitutional crisis draw closer. END COMMENT.

Bullen